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Municipal responsibilities in strategic housing provision planning: to accommodate, support and facilitate

Jimmie Andersén ^a, Lina Berglund-Snodgrass ^b and Ebba Högström ^a

^aDepartment of Spatial Planning, Blekinge Institute of Technology, Karlskrona, Sweden; ^bDepartment of Landscape Architecture, Planning and Management, Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences, Alnarp, Sweden

ABSTRACT

Swedish municipalities are obliged to formulate housing provision policies in housing programs, as part of municipal strategic planning. This article explores how municipalities interpret this responsibility. We analyze housing provision programs by drawing from prospective responsibility and policy analysis. Our analysis shows three different prospective responsibilities in the municipality's production of housing provision responsibility. The results show that municipalities take actions by different means, leading to ambiguities and inequalities in housing provision planning.

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1. Introduction

Strategic spatial planning is ‘a public-sector-led socio-spatial process through which a vision, actions, and means for implementation are produced that shape and frame what a place is and may become’ (Albrechts, 2004, p. 747). Housing provision comprises one example of such a public-sector-led socio-spatial process in which public actors are responsible for visioning housing and developing means for its accomplishment (cf. Albrechts, 2004; Healey, 2009). Strategic housing provision often concerns public actor activities for enabling affordable housing as part of urban developments, such as allocating a specified share of development to affordable housing (van den Nouwelant *et al.*, 2015; Legacy *et al.*, 2016; Pill *et al.*, 2020), or using statutory land-use planning systems to influence the provision of affordable housing (Paris, 2007). There are however differences in the institutional framework between countries regarding the ways in which strategic housing provision can be pursued (Phibbs & Gurrán, 2021), which posit public actors with different possibilities to act vis a vis other actors. For example, in Sweden housing provision is a municipal responsibility regulated through a national housing provision law (SFS 2000:1383). In addition, what affordability entails in different contexts also differs (Paris, 2007). Sweden, for example, has no designated social housing, which makes affordability in the ordinary housing market a key concern (Grander, 2021). Such differences situates public actors with different opportunities as well as moral obligations to act so as to make available adequate housing.

CONTACT Jimmie Andersén  jimmie.andersen@bth.se

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The changing landscape of governmental reform during the 1980–90s, in Sweden as well as in much of the Global North, contributed to the ‘marketization’ of housing policy and a shift of responsibilities and consequent financial risks from the collective represented through government to the individual (Hedin *et al.*, 2012; Christophers, 2013; Grundström & Molina, 2016; Grander, 2019). These reforms have been described as a neo-liberalization of housing policy (Hedin *et al.*, 2012; Christophers, 2013), and as resulting in privatization of social and public housing and promotion of homeownership. The over reliance on the action of market actors to fulfill public housing goals (Adams, 2011; Been *et al.*, 2019) have been criticized for generating developments such as high-end housing in central or attractive neighborhoods and reinforced patterns of segregation (Been *et al.*, 2019). The ways in which public actors can steer housing provision towards public goals (e.g. equality and inclusion) have been important topics for researchers the last decades (Adams, 2011; Ford & March, 2012; Gurran & Ruming, 2016; Savini *et al.*, 2016). Not least in the recent literature on housing financialization in the aftermath of the 2007 financial crises, and the role public actors play in developing and facilitating financialization/definancialisation (Wijburg, 2021; Lima *et al.*, 2022). This article adds to these broader discussions on the role of public actors in strategic housing provision planning by focusing on what public actors, with a specific focus on municipalities, do to provide adequate housing to its inhabitants. By examining strategic housing provision planning we interrogate the specific public actor responsibility vis-à-vis other actors in making housing available.

Strategic housing provision planning is a broad strategic process in the sense that it ideally integrates a number of sectoral objectives (social, financial) into a comprehensive policy for making adequate housing available for the citizens, including the promotion, preparation, and implementation of measures towards this end. Given this broad and integrative scope of strategic housing provision planning, we argue that housing provision responsibility is produced in the nexus between different policy areas such as social policy, business, and land-use policy (cf. Legacy *et al.*, 2016). This means that strategic housing provision planning is not a task subject to a specific sector or political committee, it is rather produced in the intersection of the different sectors and actors. Planners get the task of coordinating/integrating the different policies into a coherent policy but also distribute responsibilities between sectors and actors (Andersén, 2020; Berglund-Snodgrass *et al.*, 2021). Strategic housing provision planning is thus not just an issue for land-use planning mechanisms, it is a broader issue of cross-sectoral policy-coordination (Stead & Meijers, 2009; Nadin *et al.*, 2021). Such broad processes include cross-sectoral spaces for constructing and negotiating what is adequate housing in the specific context, but also ideas of means and mechanisms for making such housing available.

In this article, we aim to examine responsibilities for making adequate housing available in strategic housing provision planning. In other words, to whom do municipalities ascribe obligations, and with what measures do municipalities aim to make housing available? The research question that guides the study is: What municipal responsibilities are produced in strategic housing provision planning?

The article is organized in five sections. Following this introduction, (i), we set out our post-structural theoretical approach guiding the study (ii). This is followed by a method section (iii) where we also present the empirical material comprising 10 municipal housing provision programs. In the analysis, (iv) we show that the municipalities

produce housing provision responsibility in three different ways: accommodating people with the right to housing, temporarily supporting people with needs for housing, and facilitating the market for people with demands. The article finishes with concluding discussion (v).

2. A post-structural theoretical approach: production of housing provision responsibilities

By aligning ourselves with scholars who study policy as a representation *of* problems rather than a reaction *to* take-for-granted problems, we direct our attention to ideas and values underpinning strategic housing policy and the ways in which these contribute to structuring and organizing society (Bacchi, 2009; cf. Foucault, 1980). We understand housing provision responsibility as something that is socially constituted. This means that we approach responsibilities to be (re)produced and configured through housing provision programs, other policy documents and plans, as well as through performing actions to these ends. From this understanding, we consider ideas and values pertinent to strategic housing policy to shape actors (e.g. the municipality and stakeholders), actor relations and their actions (measures to make available housing). Taking this standpoint, we tend to the ways in which policies are constructed and how such constructions shape institutions and actor roles. Here, we are specifically interested in one such actor relation; the relation of responsibility. As the housing provision responsibility is forward looking and future oriented, e.g. setting out what they will do to accommodate objectives, we focus on the prospective dimension of responsibility (Cane, 2002). Prospective responsibility concerns constructions of duties, obligations, roles, and tasks (Cane, 2002; Bexell, 2005). For example, policies for housing provision can be represented to concern the municipal obligation to have land-prepared for developers, but with no duty to make any other demands on the housing. By duty, we refer to legally necessitated acts or actions, e.g. the municipality has to do something to fulfill legal requirements. In contrast, constructing responsibility in terms of obligations refers to representing problems in such a way that ascribes acts or actions that are based on a moral foundation to do what is seen as the correct thing to do, which might not be bound to a legal obligation. Obligations are not necessitated by law or force from other actors. Rather, they represent self-imposed sets of rules by which an actor acts (cf. Brandt, 1964; Rawls, 1971).

By adopting Bacchi (2009) analytical framework ‘What’s the problem represented to be’ (WPR), we analyze assumptions of responsibility in municipal housing provision policies. The foundation of WPR is an understanding of policies as building upon ways of formulating problems, rather than delivering solutions to problems. In the WPR tradition, questions are posed to untangle ‘the ways of talking about a problem’ (Bacchi, 2009:7).

2.1. “What’s the problem represented to be” approach to analyzing housing provision programs

In her work, Bacchi postulates six questions as a framework to explore underlying ideas in policies, how these ideas are constructed and translated into policy, and what

Table 1. Summary of analytical questions of WPR (Bacchi, 2009).

	Bacchi's question:	Analytical focus
wp1	What's the problem represented to be?	What housing provision problems are represented in municipal housing provision programs?
wp2	What assumptions underlie the problems?	What assumptions about prospective responsibility underlie the housing provision problem representations?
wp3	What effects are produced by this representation?	What subject positions are produced through these problem representations?

Table 2. Size and geographical location of the municipalities included in the case study.

Case	Municipality type	Population	Location	Length	Year of acceptance
Municipality A	Large city	130 000	North	33	2017
Municipality B	Rural	4 000	North	17	2017
Municipality C	Smaller city	60 000	North	19	2018
Municipality D	Smaller city	11 000	Mid	20	2015
Municipality E	Municipality near large city	100 000	Mid	10	2018
Municipality F	Large city	1 000 000	Mid	50	2018
Municipality G	Smaller city	15 000	South	29	2017
Municipality H	Smaller city	65 000	South	26	2016
Municipality I	Smaller	9 000	South	26	2016
Municipality J	Large city	90 000	South	41	2017

knowledge and assumptions they rest upon.¹ We use the first three questions in Bacchi's framework (presented in Table 1) which also organizes the analysis. Below we will go through each of the questions.

Q1. *What housing provision problems are represented in municipal strategic housing provision programs?*

This first question comprises the basic question of what 'problem' the specific policy seeks to 'solve'? By posing this question, the underlying problem representations of the strategic housing provision program are set center stage. This means we will attend to assumptions of housing needs and interconnected problems that underpin the housing provision policies. Housing needs may, for example, be constructed as a problem of the individual and the consequent solutions concerns making individuals find housing through matchmaking activities (i.e. connecting possible landlords with possible tenants). What individuals or groups of individuals are constructed to have particular housing needs or problems to acquire housing is of particular interest in this regard.

Q2. *What assumptions about prospective responsibility underlie the housing provision problem representations?*

The second question brings attention to assumptions of municipal duties and obligations with regards to the different problem representations that are identified in Q1. We analyze assumptions of duties and obligations in listed measures, strategies or intentions such as matching available flats with the right tenants or developing targeted housing for particular groups.



Table 3. Overview of results.

	Problem	Municipal responsibility	Subjectivities
Duty to accommodate	The authorities have to care for individuals who are unable to care for themselves, supporting them with housing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prepare land for supported accommodations in new developments • Perform viable demand analyses • Updating and analyzing the population forecast • Collaboration with landlords 	Older people, children and young people, people with disabilities, and newly immigrated people (with residence permission) are defined as vulnerable groups, and thus with a right to housing
Obligation to temporarily support	Housing should be provided through market mechanisms. The authorities have to support those individuals who can't independently access housing on the market	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Social support/providing assistance in finding housing • Provide trial contract • Collaboration with landlords and developers 	Individuals' economic and/or social (substance abuse/mental illhealth) situations may temporarily posit them outside the housing market
Obligation to facilitate the market	Housing should be provided by the market. The authorities have to make sure that the market fulfills housing demands	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Demographic analysis • Collaboration with contractors, real estate owners and housing companies • Comprehensive and detailed planning – promoting local growth • Providing a 'quick' and 'smooth' housing construction process • Land purchase 	The population comprises market actors such as students, older people and families

Q3. *What subject positions are produced through these problem representations?*

The third question directs its focus to the subjectivities housing provision problem representations produce. For example, individuals may be constructed with particular traits such as ‘incapable’ or ‘economically dependent’. Through policy, space for action is created or taken away from different actors and individuals (Bacchi, 2009). The production of subjectivities includes actor identities with accompanying expectations and responsibilities. We will attend to categories and identify attributes that individuals or groups are coupled with in ‘chains of equivalence’ (i.e. as capable of acquiring adequate housing) or ‘chains of differential’ (not independent in acquiring adequate housing).

3. On method and empirical material

This study is a qualitative document analysis (Bergström & Boréus, 2012) of municipal housing provision programs in 10 Swedish municipalities. Swedish municipalities are required by law (SFS 2000:1383) to have a housing provision program. Following a revision of the law more than a decade later (SFS 2013:866), the housing provision programs shall: (i) state the municipal intent for construction of new housing and development of existing housing in the municipality, (ii) show planned activities to reach stated housing goals, (iii) account for how national and regional goals, policies and plans relevant to housing have been considered.

The law requests municipalities to discuss and coordinate their strategic housing provision programs with neighboring municipalities, the county administrative board, and other regional governmental bodies (SFS 2000:1383). The strategic housing provision programs should be subject to acceptance by the municipal council once every four-year mandate period. Should the local conditions of housing provision change, new programs are to be prepared and accepted by the municipal council (SFS 2000:1383).

We selected 10 municipalities across Sweden, which are of different sizes and geographies, including large urban areas, smaller towns and disperse rural municipalities. We understand the municipal housing provision programs as so-called ‘typical and average cases’ (Flyvbjerg, 2006) even though each of these municipalities have different preconditions, assets and challenges with regards to housing shortage (i.e. the housing shortage cuts across large and small, as well as urban and rural municipalities). The programs characterize typical Swedish municipal documents, and are thus not selected based on representing particularly successful, innovative or failed housing provision programs. Each municipal housing provision program typically comprises 20 to 40 pages, usually consisting of one section for analysis and one section for prescribing housing policies and measures. See Table 2 for a brief overview of the municipal size and geographical location of the 10 municipalities researched.

Besides analyzing the housing provisions programs that municipalities are legally bound to produce, we have not included any complementary or subsequent documents, such as action plans and the like. The reasons to focus on housing provision programs only are that we wanted to investigate the legally required housing provision programs, as this is the basic criterion in the municipal housing responsibility. The procedure for analysis was a step-by-step approach in reading the source material

based on the three questions outlined in the previous section. First, a general reading was carried out, followed by an initial close coding of the empirical material. The coding was carried out using keywords to search the documents. Keywords were chosen after the general reading and we searched for the keywords with different inflectional forms as well as different suffixes and prefixes. Thereafter, the material was sorted in accordance with different underpinning ideas and problem representations (e.g. the WPR 1–3 questions). In this process, we identified three different representations of housing provision problems to which municipalities ascribe different types of duties and obligations and from which subjectivities are produced. The presentation of the analysis in the next section is organized by these three different problem representations. The excerpts from the empirical material have been translated by the authors from Swedish to English. After now having set out the overarching method, empirical material and procedure for analysis, we will now move over to presenting the analysis.

4. Analyzing housing provision problems and assumptions of municipal responsibility

All the housing provision programs that we examined follow the same general pattern in how the policy is presented. They usually begin with background statements on their legal requirements to develop housing provision programs, their general goals for housing, demographic analysis, and an analysis of the local housing market. Next to presenting these general issues, the programs present what is referred to as emerging local housing issues, as well as policies for remedying these issues.

In the analysis of the housing provision program, we identified three broad problem representations which position the municipality with duties and obligations vis-à-vis other actors in making housing available. We have categorized these problem representations as: (i) municipal duty to accommodate people with a legislative right to housing (ii) municipal obligation to support people in need of housing (iii) municipal obligation to facilitate the market as a mechanism for housing supply and demand. We will go through each problem representation below. The problem representations are organized in accordance with the three analytical questions provided in the analytical framework and are summarized in [Table 3](#) below.

4.1. Duty to accommodate people with legislative right to housing

The first problem representation that we identified in the strategic housing provision programs sets out housing as a legislative right and as a municipal responsibility. This problem representation draws from the recognition that some individuals are considered unable to tend for themselves and that public sector institutions have a responsibility to attend to their needs on their behalf. For some groups, their needs are seconded by their legal right to adequate housing. The right to be offered housing is established in several legal acts, such as the Social Service Act (SSA) (SFS 2001:453), the Reception of Certain Newly Arrived Immigrants for Residence Act (RCNAIRA) (SFS 2016:38) and, as stated in the following quote, the Disability Act (DA) (SFS 1993:387).²

In municipality [G], residential care is offered for older people [according to SSA], people with disabilities are offered supported accommodation and children and youth short-term housing according to the Disability Act (DA). (Municipality G, 2018:21, bracketed text added by the authors)

Representing housing provision as a right and subject to municipal provision, as suggested in the quote above is, not extrapolated to encompass all citizens. People are not considered as having a general right to housing, rather the right to housing is an explicit legislative right and subject to assessment, regardless of the grounds (e.g. health, age, disability, social issues, or newly arrived immigrants^[4]).³ Old people, children and young people, people with disabilities, and newly immigrated people (with residence permission) are constructed with the identity of being vulnerable and in a chain of equivalence entitled with specific rights to housing. Other subjectivities include individuals with ‘psychosocial challenges’ (Municipality A, 2017; Municipality F, 2017), ‘victims of violence’ (Municipality J, 2017) or ‘single parents’ (Municipality C, 2018). The municipality is represented as having a *duty* towards these groups of individuals who are assessed by the social services to be in need of care and support services. Housing for these individuals is highlighted as a matter that cannot be relegated to the uncertainties of a ‘housing market’ and should, therefore, be provided by the municipality, as a way to ensure stability, long-term security and continuity (Municipality E 2018 Municipality J, 2017). The notion of responsibility also draws from the recognition that if the municipality do not fulfill their duty in providing housing for those assessed to have a right to housing, the municipality may risk financial consequences, such as fines levied by the state (DA, SFS 1993:387; SFS 2001:453; SSA).

To fulfill this duty, a variety of measures are presented in the strategic housing provision programs, ranging from strategic and long-term measures to accommodate individuals in adequate housing, to more individual solutions on shorter notice. Examples of more long-term strategies concern the municipal duty to allocate land for residential care and supported accommodations in new development areas. Another municipal duty is to perform viable demand analyses of municipal elder care and disability service operations in new urban development projects (Municipality I, 2016; Municipality B, 2017; Municipality E 2017; Municipality J, 2017). This means that the municipality shall always in every development project consider the allocation of land but also planning preparedness for such accommodations. One municipality formulates such land allocation strategies like this:

Municipal land shall be set aside for the construction of residential care for older people in need of extensive care, and care in accordance with the needs shown by the population forecast analysis. [...] In each major development project on municipal land, it must be assessed whether supported housing can be accommodated. (Municipality A, 2017)

Another municipal duty includes regularly updating and analyzing the population forecast to have knowledge of future demands with regards to these user groups. These duties do not only concern new developments, municipalities are also represented to have the duty to construct, rebuild or repurpose existing facilities (Municipality A, 2017; Municipality B, 2017; Municipality J, 2017; Municipality C, 2018), and offer housing in the ordinary stock of municipal housing companies (Municipality D, 2015; Municipality J, 2017). One municipality state:

It is not just about new construction [of housing] but also about efforts in the existing housing stock to, for example, make apartments accessible to people with disabilities. This applies to all residents' needs for housing, but certain groups may need special attention. (Municipality C, 2018)

Even though the municipalities are represented to have the duty to accommodate people with assessed rights to housing, sometimes the operationalization of the duty is distributed to the municipal housing companies and real estate offices (Municipality A, 2017; Municipality F, 2017). That is, the responsibility to carry out the actual task of finding housing and overseeing adjustments to cater to this group is delegated to the municipal housing company. This means that planners have less direct influence on where and how this housing is accomplished, but it can also be to represent a form of cooperation between different municipal actors to fulfill the municipal housing provision responsibility.

The municipal real estate offices and municipal housing companies are also represented in the housing provision programs as the responsible actors for arranging and administering housing for the individuals assessed with rights to housing (Municipality A, 2017; Municipality F, 2017, 2017). It is also emphasized that to fulfill their municipal duties, municipal real estate offices are expected to cooperate with landlords and owners of other types of housing. One such cooperative duty is making private property owners compile lists of apartments that could be made available for the real estate office to rent for the purpose of establishing trial and training apartments⁴ (Municipality F, 2017). This duty concerns ensuring that there is a preparedness and a longer term plan for such accommodations but also that necessary cooperation and coordination between public and private actors are in place.

4.2. Obligation to (temporarily) support individuals having need for housing

The second problem representation of housing provision that prevails in the empirical material recognizes housing as an *individual responsibility* while acknowledging that some individuals face challenges in independently acquiring housing. The municipality's responsibility is represented to include the obligation to provide temporary support to those individuals. Individual economic or social situations (e.g. living under threat of violence, social issues and being economically indebted) are represented as the reasons as to why they are unable to independently acquire housing (Municipality A, 2017; Municipality C, 2018; Municipality E 2018; Municipality F, 2017; Municipality J, 2017). These concerns are represented as insurmountable obstacles for acquiring adequate housing through the ordinary housing market. Individuals are here constructed in a chain of equivalence with the identity of having economic and social difficulties and as being 'outside the housing market' (Municipality E, 2018). For example, municipality E defines people who are outside the ordinary housing market as follows:

There are households that for various reasons cannot arrange and finance their own housing and who are granted a temporary housing contract. There are households in social care that for various reasons are not approved as tenants of the ordinary housing market and which are granted a fixed-term contract, so called social lease. (Municipality E, 2018)

The subjectivity of being ‘outside’ the housing market is represented as a major obstacle to independently acquiring housing. The municipality is represented as having the obligation to temporarily⁵ support their capacity to acquire housing (Municipality F, 2017) by, for example, providing assistance in gaining access to housing through other means than direct purchase. The municipal obligations towards these groups include providing assistance in finding housing (on a case-to-case basis as well overall) by cooperating between the municipal departments, landlords and other actors, but also to provide such temporary support until market entry is a possibility. One example of such temporary support is providing, so-called trial contracts. One municipality describe this form of support like this:

Trial and training apartments and Housing First apartments are apartments in the ordinary stock. The purpose of these trial apartments is to transfer the first-hand contract to the resident after one year at the earliest, provided that the accommodation has worked well (here meaning that that the tenant has fulfilled the requirements of the contract). As for Housing First, the tenant in (F municipality) gets a trial contract, but without other reservations than that the Tenancy Act⁶ must be complied with. To this there is added extensive support to the residents. A training apartment is intended to be a preparation for living in a trial apartment or some other more permanent form of housing. (Municipality F, 2017, bracketed text added by the authors)

In the quotation, the municipality highlights the individual responsibility of the trial contract. The municipality is represented as having the obligation to assist and support in acquiring the contract but the individual has the duty to comply with the terms of the tenancy. In the quotation, training apartments are highlighted as a step towards the trial apartment, whereas the housing within the Housing First-model⁷ comes with a trial contract to which extensive social support is connected, as well as the individual duty to comply with the terms of tenancy and thus make possible a permanent contract. The Housing First apartments are only available for certain individuals, for example, to homeless people with substance abuse and/or mental illness.

The municipal obligation to provide temporary support also includes delivering data and prognoses for socioeconomic development, as well as arranging so that housing that can be used for trial contracts are prepared or built. These are more long-term measures, aimed at having a higher degree of flexibility and more effective means in assisting this group.

4.3. Obligation to facilitate the market to produce housing that matches the demands of the population

The third housing provision problem representation concerns the population’s general housing demands and presents *housing provision as a matter of market economy and logic*. The assumption of responsibility underlying this problem representation is that municipalities have an obligation to facilitate and support the local market’s functioning by interventions to overcome market failure, so that the housing production meets the demands of the population. Such a municipal obligation concerns making demographic and housing market analyses; reserving and preparing land and property for development (Municipality D, 2015; Municipality B, 2017), comprehensive and detailed

planning (Municipality D, 2015; Municipality G, 2018), and promoting local growth (Municipality D, 2015; Municipality G, 2018). One underlying assumption in this problem representation is the so-called ‘trickle-down effects’ and the market’s intrinsic ability to meet different housing demands. Furthermore, competition on a common local housing market is assumed. Construction of housing is considered to have this trickle-down effect, newly built housing is considered beneficial also for those with limited economic resources. What the municipality seeks to accomplish through their interventions are ‘vacancy chains’⁸:

Each newly produced home means that, via vacancy chains, an average of four to five households can move to a new and more adequate home. The larger and more expensive the newly produced home is, the longer the chain will be. (Municipality H, 2016)

The housing provision programs repeatedly refer to vacancy chains as a solution to housing supply problems in market brackets below the high-end housing (Municipality H, 2016; Municipality I, 2016; Municipality F, 2017; Municipality C, 2018).

The municipalities represent their obligation to facilitate the market with an underlying rationales of making the market work ‘better’ with regards to supply meeting demand, or providing a ‘quicker’ and ‘smoother’ housing construction process, and a more ‘efficient’ process in planning and building new development (Municipality B, 2017; Municipality G, 2018; Municipality H 2016).

An efficient construction process from plan to implementation depends on good collaboration between the actors, market actors and the municipality. Having a transparent process with clear rules and a good dialogue increases the possibilities for a swift and good implementation. (Municipality B, 2017)

The municipality’s assumed obligation to facilitate the market appears to be to secure a sufficient supply of housing for individuals with a housing demand and means to acquire housing on their own, with as little market hindering intervention from the municipality as possible. To this end, planning becomes an important activity of supplying developers with land and the necessary planning decisions, knowledge base and services to assure a speedy building process. Cooperating and collaborating in housing development are viewed as important means for the municipalities in facilitating the local housing markets:

H municipality has continuous meetings with several of the housing market actors in various contexts. These networks must be maintained and developed in order to achieve broad cooperation in housing construction and increase the probability of successful projects and efficient processes. Other actors in the housing market . . . should be involved so that the municipality can take advantage of their knowledge and experience.

H municipality must clarify and streamline the planning and implementation process in order to provide good service to market actors. (Municipality H, 2016)

With regards to what forms of housing different groups demand and which groups are considered to have these demands, the strategic housing provision programs show a great variety. Students and older people are mentioned, besides demands for specific types of common types or categories of housing (Municipality B, 2017); general demand for single households (Municipality H, 2016; Municipality A, 2017; Municipality F, 2017; Municipality C, 2018); as well as housing for families with children (Municipality D,

2015; Municipality C, 2018) are examples of groups and types of housing demands mentioned in the housing provision programs.

As a result of representing housing provision *as a matter of market economy and logic*, the subject position produced for the citizens is that of a market actor competing with other potential buyers of housing stock. Capital will give citizens the possibility to compete for high-end housing. In the strategic housing provision programs, this difference is reflected in arguments about needing to cater to different demands.

Housing construction must correspond to demand. The municipality must ensure that it, together with private actors, provide a varied range of housing of good quality that can attract different people, special needs must also be considered. The goal is for everyone, who so wishes, to have access to housing, regardless of financial circumstances. By analyzing the supply of different forms of leasing, size and cost levels in relation to demand, the municipality ensures that what is needed is created. (Municipality J, 2017)

A housing market with a high degree of volatility where units of housing are on the market for a short time is equated with a well-functioning market. There is a chain of equivalence between such a market and well-functioning housing provision for all citizens, commonly represented in recurrent arguments of vacancy chains solving housing supply in different market brackets (Municipality D, 2015; Municipality H, 2016; Municipality A, 2017; Municipality G, 2018).

5. Ambiguities and inequalities in strategic housing provision planning

This article aims to examine which responsibilities for housing provision are produced through strategic housing planning. By drawing on the notion of prospective responsibility, i.e. forward-looking responsibilities concerning duties, obligations, roles, and tasks (Cane, 2002; Bexell, 2005), we identified three notions of municipal responsibility in our empirical material. These are defined as (i) a duty to accommodate those with a right to housing (ii) an obligation to support those with need and (iii) an obligation to facilitate the market to produce housing that matches the population's demand.

With regard to the duty to accommodate those with a right to housing, the municipalities fulfill their housing provision responsibility through a variety of measures, including securing accommodation, allocating land for housing, performing demographic and housing market analyses, administering the adjusting existing housing stock, arranging and administering housing and detailed as well as strategic planning.

The housing provision responsibility towards those in need of housing is fulfilled through providing assistance in acquiring adequate housing and, in the long run, housing market entry. When and if individuals are ready to enter the 'ordinary housing market', the municipalities assist in finding housing. Other measures include collaboration between municipalities, municipal housing companies and other landlords to find or arrange housing. Measures also include to deliver data and prognoses for planning housing provision, as well as arranging housing for trial contracts.

Facilitating the market is seen as a responsibility in housing provision through an efficient market catering to local housing demand. This responsibility is fulfilled through making demographic and housing market analyses as well as comprehensive and detailed

planning. Other measures include reserve and preparing land and property for development. There is a strong assumption of trickle-down effects through vacancy chains, cooperation and collaboration with actors in building and private landlords as well as municipal housing companies are sought after in the ambition to achieve these vacancy chains.

Our analysis thus shows that assuming housing provision responsibility through strategic housing planning entails a multitude of different measures. We conclude that the municipalities take housing provision responsibility through strategic housing planning mainly in three ways; *as social policy*, *as land use planning* and *as housing market facilitation*.

Strategic housing planning *as social policy* entails taking housing provision responsibility for groups with a right to and in need of housing. The municipalities seek to plan for an efficient provision of housing by ensuring that housing for these groups is available, as well as to the forthcoming needs and adjustments needed in existing housing stock to meet the needs of the group. This is the *a priori* strategic approach, where measures are planned in advance. However, the municipalities also assume housing provision responsibility on a more *ad hoc* and case-to-case basis, arranging housing on short notice and under specific circumstances. The motivations for planning measures are similar in other contexts, such as Australia (van den Nouwelant *et al.*, 2015) and the Netherlands (cf. Savini *et al.*, 2016). Paris (2007) argues that the issue of affordable housing emerges in different ways depending on context, where free-market economies with a small social housing sector tend to have had such a debate for a longer time period, and that countries with a large public rental sector provide affordable housing through public rental housing. While the latter is true for Sweden historically, the development described in our introduction, i.e. the marketization of housing (Hedin *et al.*, 2012; Christophers, 2013; Grundström & Molina, 2016; Grander, 2019), municipalities now have to seek dwellings outside of the public rental sector. This change of where to find housing for social ends is also true in other countries (Howell *et al.*, 2019; Jacobs & Manzi, 2020).

Strategic housing planning *as land use planning* firstly entails ordinary land use planning, detailed planning, comprehensive planning and other planning activities such as reviewing building permit applications and issuing building permits. It also entails using and producing data and knowledge specifically for measures ensuring that the municipality fulfills its housing provision responsibility. This includes producing data and knowledge specifically to this end, producing housing provision programs is one such example. While planning and housing provision have come under pressure to facilitate the local market, in Sweden and elsewhere (Christophers, 2013; Andersén, 2020; Jacobs & Manzi, 2020), it still retains an important role in steering development and in policy formulation (Phibbs & Gurran, 2021). That is, if planners provide data, analysis and knowledge base for plan making, and partly steering development and policy formulation, planners can actually influence land use policies.

Strategic housing planning *as housing market facilitation* entails supporting the functioning of the local housing market, promoting and simplifying building development. Planning for market facilitation is a general trend globally (Filion *et al.*, 2020; Jacobs & Manzi, 2020). Assuming housing provision responsibility through housing planning as market facilitation implies doing land use planning, but it also implies coordinating and collaborating in housing provision measures – with the intent of a smooth and efficient local housing market and building process. Policies aimed at market facilitation have proven to favor the more affluent groups in society, and are insufficient in providing adequate housing for marginalized groups

of inhabitants (van den Nouweland *et al.*, 2015; Legacy *et al.*, 2016). Vacancy chains have not proven to be a catch all solution to housing provision, not in Sweden or internationally and certainly not across socioeconomic classes (Rasmusson *et al.*, 2018). Despite this, the Swedish housing programs show an excessive confidence in their distributive effects.

There are ambiguities in the means by which the municipalities are trying to assume responsibility for housing provision through strategic planning measures which stems from obscurities in the housing provision law. Municipalities interpret their responsibility in different ways which in turn produce unequal effects. Such inequality manifests itself as different handlings of housing provision responsibilities between different municipalities, but also in such a way that the needs and demands of different inhabitants risk being handled differently. This ambiguity and inequality in housing provision and in planning is not unique to the Swedish context. Research shows the same to be true in housing and planning globally (Savini *et al.*, 2016; Jacobs & Manzi, 2020). Measures to come to terms with such ambiguities and establish more unified planning and housing practices should in our opinion include clearly stated roles and functions for housing planning. We here agree with (van den Nouweland *et al.*, 2015; Legacy *et al.*, 2016) that market facilitation as a guiding principle in supplying housing does not suffice on its own in delivering adequate housing for all.

Further, our findings show that the municipalities deliver social service and welfare in their aspiration to fulfill the housing provision responsibility. Municipalities also deliver support for local economic growth and housing market facilitation. However, social service and welfare interests have conflicting interests with growth and market facilitation (Gunder, 2016; Jacobs & Manzi, 2020). On the one hand, housing provision to social ends is easier to find and more efficient in economic terms in less affluent markets, on the other hand, a volatile and affluent market with vacancy chains enabling the more well off to be able to buy the dwelling they seek is considered a well functioning local housing market. Thus, the interests served by the different strategies might entail different definitions on what is a well functioning provision of housing. The municipalities might try to serve everyone, but in effect their efforts turn out as substandard for all. Whereas those with the right to housing to a large extent have their interests secured through legislation and the well off can rely on market facilitation, the socioeconomically vulnerable inhabitants risk drawing a very short straw. In order to avoid this, we concur with Legacy *et al.* (2016), policy can be used as a foundation for a narrative of social inclusivity. In other words – policies matter.

Notes

1. Bacchi's (2009:xii) six questions read as.
 1. What's the 'problem' represented to be in a specific policy?
 2. What presuppositions or assumptions underlie this representation of the 'problem'?
 3. How has this representation of the 'problem' come about?
 4. What is left unproblematic in this problem representation?
 5. What effects are produced by this representation of the 'problem'?
 6. How/where has this representation of the 'problem' been produced, disseminated, and defended? How could it be questioned, disrupted, and replaced?

We do not use questions 4–5. Question 4 is left out on methodological grounds, to be able to answer this question we would have needed to conduct interviews and also research the process in producing the housing provision programs. Question 5 is answered to a large extent in questions 1–3, we thus chose not to include this question as an answer risk being

repeating the answer to other questions in an article form work. The article as a whole can be considered as delivering an answer to question 6, with questions 1–3 giving the foundation to our analysis and conclusions on production, dissemination, defense, and critical thinking about the problem representations in the housing provision programs.

2. The Disability Act (SFS 1993:387), with the abbreviation DA, steers the municipal obligation to provide support and service for certain people with disabilities, such as neuropsychiatric, cognitive, or physical disabilities.
3. The group of newly arrived immigrants must have been granted a residence permit to be included in the the Reception of Certain Newly Arrived Immigrants for Residence Act (RCNAIRA) (SFS 2016:38).
4. Trial and training apartments are housing solutions with the aim to transfer the first-hand contract to the resident after one year at the earliest, provided that the accommodation has worked well. The tenant must show their ability to pay rent in due time, not disturbing the neighbors, and keeping the flat in an acceptable shape.
5. In some specific cases during longer periods.
6. Chapter 12 of the Land Code is usually called the Tenancy Act. This chapter refers to agreements, through which houses or parts of houses are leased for use for remuneration.
7. Housing First is a model of working with housing provision based on recognizing housing as a basic right and a prerequisite for individuals to be able to manage challenges in life. In Housing First, homeless people with a complex life situation, such as substance abuse and/or mental illness, are offered their own apartment, as well individually tailored support measures (Municipal F 2017).
8. A ‘vacancy chain’ is a chain of households moving house that is initiated by housing becoming available on the housing market, e.g. a newly constructed apartment in the high-end will lead to a vacancy in a more affordable one as the household moves along the chain.

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ORCID

Jimmie Andersén  <http://orcid.org/0000-0003-2262-1142>

Lina Berglund-Snodgrass  <http://orcid.org/0000-0003-3003-0457>

Ebba Högström  <http://orcid.org/0000-0002-7725-1233>

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